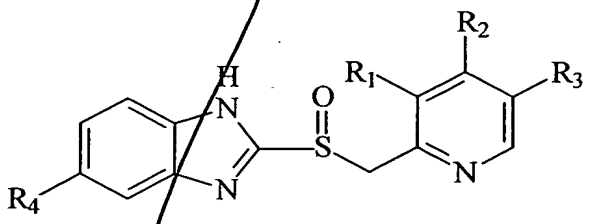
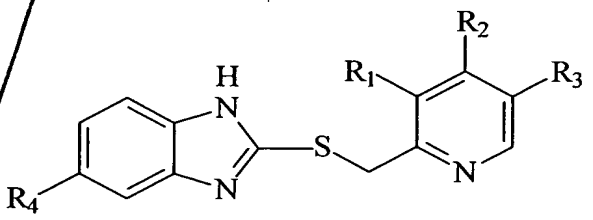
WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A process for preparing a thioester compound of formula A:



A

wherein R_1, R_2, and R_4 are each selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl and substituted or unsubstituted lower alkoxy; and R_3 is selected from the group consisting of hydrogen and substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl, comprising reacting a thioether compound of formula B



B

wherein R_1 through R_4 are as in formula A, with an oxidizing agent to produce selective oxidation of the thioether compound of formula B to form the thioester compound of formula A.

2. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidation is performed at a temperature from about -10^0C to about 30^0C.

3. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidation is performed for about 2 hours to about 10 hours.

4. The process according to claim 1, wherein R_1 is methyl; R_2 is methoxy; R_3 is methyl and R_4 is methoxy.

5. The process according to claim 1, wherein R_1 is methyl; R_2 is 2-trifluoroethoxy; R_3 is hydrogen and R_4 is hydrogen.

6. The process according to claim 1, wherein R_1 is methoxy; R_2 is methoxy; R_3 is hydrogen and R_4 is difluoromethoxy.

7. The process according to claim 1, wherein R_1 is methyl; R_2 is $MeOCH_2CH_2CH_2O$; R_3 is hydrogen and R_4 is hydrogen.

8. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidizing agent is *tert*-butyl hydroperoixde in the presence of a catalyst.

9. The process according to claim 8, wherein the catalyst is selected from the group consisting of vanadyl bis-acetylacetonate, sodium meta-vanadate and vanadium pentoxide.

10. The process according to claim 8, wherein the molar ratio of *tert*-butyl hydroperoxide to the compound of formula B is in the range of about 1.15 to about 4.5.

~~11. The process according to claim 8, wherein the catalyst is vanadyl bis-acetylacetonate.~~

12. The process according to claim 8, wherein the vanadyl bis-acetylacetonate and the compound of formula B is in the molar ratio of about 0.01 to about 0.6.

13. The process according to any one of claims 8-12, wherein the oxidation is performed in an organic solvent.

14. The process according to claim 13, wherein the organic solvent is selected from the group consisting of toluene, lower alkanols and ethyl acetate.

15. The process according to claim 13, wherein the oxidation is performed in an organic solvent in the presence of water.

16. The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidizing agent is Oxone®.

17. The process according to claim 16, wherein the molar ratio between Oxone® and the compound of formula B is from about 1.25-1.6 to about 1.

18. The process according to claim 16, wherein the molar ratio between Oxone® and the compound of formula B is from about 1.4-1.6 to about 1.

19. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed of an aqueous organic solvent.

20. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in the presence any one or more of acetone and methanol.

21. A process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in about 5% aqueous methanol.

22. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in a two-phase system selected from (CH_2Cl_2/H_2O) and (ethyl acetate/H_2O).

23. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in the presence of phase-transferred catalyst.

24. The process according to claim 16, wherein the oxidation is performed in the presence of *tert*-butyl ammonium bromide.

25. Omerprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims 1, 4, 8 or 16.

26. Lansoprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims 1, 5, 8 or 16.

27. Pantoprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims 1, 6, 8 or 16.

28. Rabeprazole substantially free of sulphone by-product prepared as in any one of claims, 1, 7, 8 or 16.